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RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000331

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DEPT FOR CA/OSC/ACS MARISOL URBINA-MITTNACHT  
DEPT ALSO FOR INR  
KIEV ALSO FOR USAID  
FRANKFURT FOR RCO RUSSEL BROWN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#) [CASC](#)  
SUBJECT: SITUATION REPORT 5: POLICE BREAK-UP PROTEST

Classified By: Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Just after 0300 March 24, security forces converged on October Square and arrested nearly everyone taking part in the opposition's on-going demonstration. Although estimates vary and authorities have not released any information, Post believes between 150 and 400 people were arrested and remain in the BKGB's pre-trial detention center. Several witnesses claim police kicked and hit some of the demonstrators, but there are no reports of any serious injuries. Ambassador placed early morning phone calls to Milinkevich and the MFA expressing the USG's concern. At least two news sources mistakenly claim a U.S. Embassy vehicle rescued the demonstration's organizer before the police arrived. That organizer is now missing. Post has received one inquiry on behalf of an Amcit about her non-Amcit grandmother, who was arrested on the square. End summary.

Hundreds Believed Arrested  
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¶2. (U) According to witnesses, around 100 OMON riot police and several buses and arrest trucks entered the square just after 0300. The police announced the demonstration was illegal and called for participants to leave. According to one witness, one person took this opportunity to depart. After waiting a few minutes police then charged into the crowd and began to carry demonstrators to the arrest trucks. Several sources report the first 40 to 50 demonstrators passively resisted and had to be carried to the trucks, but the rest then voluntarily walked to the trucks themselves. Journalists were allowed to photograph the events, and photos show police did not use their batons (photos can be seen at [www.charter97.org](http://www.charter97.org)). However, several sources claim police kicked and hit several demonstrators as they were being arrested. The Zubr youth group and Agence France Press both report that police used some sort of "white gas" against detainees once they were on the trucks, but this information remains unconfirmed.

Those detained are believed to be mainly in the BKGB's Okrestina detention center, with the possibility some are in other police detention centers.

¶3. (U) Estimates of the number of demonstrators arrested varies, but the best estimate is between 150 and 400. The Vyasna human rights NGO has released the names of 93 people known to have been arrested. Members of Milinkevich's campaign team, including Milinkevich himself, are trying to

get details on who and how many were arrested. Milinkevich reported one of his wife's sons is among those arrested. So far authorities are not giving out any information or giving access to the detainees. Some reports say two of Kozulin's nephews are among those arrested.

14. (C) Polish charge Alexander Vasilevich confirmed to Pol Chief that Mariusz Maszkiewicz, Polish Ambassador to Belarus from 1998 to 2001, was among those arrested on the square. Maszkiewicz reported to his embassy that he had been beaten by police at some point during his detention. Vasilevich noted that Maszkiewicz entered Belarus with a regular tourist passport and visa.

#### Trials Likely on March 27

15. (C) Human rights lawyer Vera Stremkovskaya told Poloff that typical practice is for the GOB to bring to court those arrested on Friday only the following Monday, as the court's schedule will already have been written for Friday. She believes the detainees will spend the weekend in the severely overcrowded Okrestina. Members of the human rights NGO Vyasna report that some minors who were arrested are being released, but cannot confirm when the others will stand trial. We have confirmed the release of at least one youth. Oleg Volchek, a member of Kozulin's campaign team, told Poloff he heard that several foreigners (Poles, Ukrainians and Russians) who were arrested had been released, and that women and minors would soon be freed.

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#### Ambassador Calls Milinkevich, MFA

16. (C) In the course of the early morning, Ambassador spoke with Milinkevich by phone to inquire about the situation of the detainees. Milinkevich said he had been to the detention center as one of his wife's sons was there, but could not get information about him or the others being held. He did not know the numbers or the details. Milinkevich thanked Ambassador for his concern and USG support for the faces of democracy. Milinkevich will hold a press conference at 1400 Minsk time.

17. (C) Ambassador also called head of the MFA America's Desk Maksim Ryzhenkov to inquire about the welfare of those arrested and request their release. Ryzhenkov claimed police acted to preserve public safety and sanitation, and that police used restraint in their actions. He stressed that the authorities allowed the demonstration to continue for several days and used minimal force in making the arrests. Ryzhenkov claimed three people resisted arrest and were carried to the arrest trucks, while the others got on the trucks voluntarily. He noted that police did not use clubs or gas, and contrasted this soft approach with how police in France are currently reacting to demonstrations. Ambassador will see Ryzhenkov at 16:00 local time, March 24, to demarche on the detainees. The EU HOMs will do so at the same time with the MFA director of the Europe Division.

#### Claims U.S. Embassy Vehicle "Rescued" Demonstration Organizer, who is Now Missing

18. (C) The Interfax news agency and the local rumor mill are claiming that, shortly before police busted the demonstration, a vehicle with diplomatic plates came to the square and whisked away Vyacheslav Sivchik, main organizer of the demonstration. Interfax claims this vehicle had diplomatic plates identifying it as a U.S. Embassy vehicle. Post has no knowledge of this event and suspects it is a GOB

provocation. Sivchik's wife came to the Embassy early Friday asking if the USG knew where her husband was. Press reports later claimed an ambulance delivered Sivchik to a Minsk hospital. No other details are available.

Amcit Concerned About Detained (non-Amcit) Grandmother  
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19. (C) Post's Consular Section received an email from U.S. permanent resident Sergei Polevnikov inquiring about his detained mother, Valentina Polevikova (Valentina's granddaughter, who is an Amcit, lives in the U.S. with her father, Sergei). Valentina is not believed to be an Amcit or permanent resident. She is one of Milinkevich's campaign managers and Post confirmed with Milinkevich's office that she was arrested on the square. Post has no confirmation of any Amcits being detained, but is checking with police and MFA sources as one AP source identified an Amcit may be among those detained.  
Krol